

FRENCH INDO-CHINA

of himself and of society. Formerly the eye was turned inward: the ideal was meditative leisure and opium reverie. The machine rudely intruded upon this introspective world, causing a rift between man and matter. Curiosity about the life around them was a novelty for the Annamites. When the first French boats appeared off the shores of Annam, the provincial governor was informed of the presence of a sea monster vomiting smoke. It never occurred to the mandarin to go out and look at it. Instead he turned to his books, recollecting that in a previous age a similar crocodile had been persuaded not to destroy the town only by propitiating sacrifices.

The machine made Annamites realize that there was more in this world than ever dreamed of by Chinese philosophers. The Annamite delegates sent to the Paris Exposition by Thanh Thai gave evidence in their reports of a new curiosity. Minute observation of the railroad tunnels and bridges; of the arrival and departure of trains on a predictable schedule; the eternal counting of the number of doors, gates, and rivers; the price of land per hectare—all were recorded. If these men showed new powers of observation they also betrayed the Annamite weakness of not distinguishing between the categories of objects classified. They were constantly distracted by a thousand irrelevant details. War workers, who became excellent mechanics, showed a childish love for machinery, and could be disciplined by being kept away from their machines, which they loved to take apart just for the pleasure of seeing the wheels go round. Aeroplanes make a vast impression and alliance the white man's prestige, though the primitive peoples, who live close to the supernatural, are less astonished than the more evolved

Annamites. King Norodom's palace had the most amazing collection of mechanical gadgets: he was astonished by the French Resident's annoyance when he had been made unsuspectingly to sit on a music box shaped like a chair.

For like few who feel the direct imprint of the machine, the changes it has wrought in their external world are obvious to all the natives. The farmer who had always precariously balanced himself on a bamboo bridge, and who can now take himself and his cart safely across a steel structure, appreciates the difference. Bridges, railroads, and highways knit rural districts together and break down the commune's isolation, formerly its pride and defence. The French are great city builders* and in a country which prior to their coming knew no large groupings of population. The TOIquest of climatic and topographical «jwftx»s involved in coiistaiGtiBg a town like Saigon are striking to